



British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945 by Paul McMahon

Review by: Donal Ó Drisceoil

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to Paris, the High Commissioner, Henri Gouroud, decided that the areas demanded by the Maronites, such as the Biqa valley, would be included within a Greater Lebanon (311). But such imperial tinkering only served to cause some fundamental problems: within Lebanon, the demographic balance had shifted against the Maronites as more Muslims (in areas more assimilated to Syria than Lebanon) came within its borders. Yet Fieldhouse concludes that 'the danger with making any assessment of Lebanese history and the effects of the French mandate is that the events of 1975 . . . cast too long a shadow. In retrospect it might seem that all roads inevitably led to the civil war . . . This is clearly wrong'. Lebanon had two decades of stability — the 1958 crisis being caused by the personal unpopularity of the president, Camille Chamoun. Instead, Fieldhouse believes it was 'the influx of Palestinian refugees and militias after 1967' that, more than anything else, destroyed the national equilibrium created by the National Pact (328).

This book is certainly recommended to both students and scholars who are interested in British and French imperial history in the Middle East. It is eloquently written and faultless in its factual detail. Moreover, the author asks key questions throughout the book and provides equally illuminating answers.

Richard John Worrall
London School of Economics

Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916–1945*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2008; xi + 516 pp.; £60.00 hbk; ISBN 9781843833765

A very effective British intelligence system minimized the impact of Irish revolutionaries from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, and it was the international (what would now be called terrorist) threat of Fenianism that gave birth to the political police of the Special Branch. Irish rebels also provided fodder for racist, imperialist propaganda against Ireland and the Irish and racial stereotyping in the second half of the nineteenth century, which, as Paul McMahon points out in the introduction to this fascinating book, 'would distort British policy towards Ireland well into the twentieth century' (8).

The pioneering and successful intelligence system of the nineteenth century had grown complacent and poor by the time a new generation of revolutionaries prepared for another push against British rule in Ireland in the second decade of the twentieth century. It was on its last legs by the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 and was then wiped out by the IRA. The new British agencies that took its place were disorganized, amateurish and ignorant. Their poor record during the revolutionary years of 1916–23 is the subject of the opening section of McMahon's book, which outlines the shortcomings of the state's tactical as well as its political/strategic intelligence. Many readers will be surprised to discover that British intelligence was aware of the plans for the

Easter Rising of 1916 but failed to alert the authorities in Ireland, either to protect a precious wartime source or, possibly, because of a wish to allow the rising to take place in order that the developing boil of radical Irish nationalism could be lanced. In the post-Rising period, the British concentrated their intelligence efforts, not very effectively, on the armed Volunteers (who would become the IRA), while failing to keep abreast of the growing political strength of Sinn Féin, which swept to victory in the December 1918 general election and declared Irish independence. This was followed by the War of Independence (1919–21), and McMahon is particularly good in using new material from British sources to throw fresh light on the nature of the crucial intelligence war. His conclusion is that the British lost the covert intelligence battle and had to resort to crass, overt intelligence methods, which yielded information but at the cost of alienating the population at large and losing Britain's grip on the southern 26 counties.

British intelligence remained 'pre-modern' and unsophisticated, as well as rather peripheral in the policy-making process, until the second world war. Its shortcomings were exacerbated in relation to Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly because of the anomalous position of the Irish Free State established in 1922. It was neither fish nor fowl. As a restless and reluctant Dominion, it failed to co-operate fully with British intelligence, while its status meant an absence of professional British diplomatic representation that could co-ordinate the gathering of reliable information and monitor the political temperature. The British instead relied on hopelessly biased and poor information, mainly from Northern Irish loyalists and disaffected southern Unionists. Militant Republicanism remained the primary preoccupation, especially its contacts, real and imaginary, with the Soviet Union and, later, Nazi Germany, and the coming to power of de Valera and Fianna Fáil in 1932 came as a nasty shock to a British establishment, whose image of the new Irish leader was, typically, a stereotype years past its sell-by date. Far from being a die-hard Republican, de Valera was a masterful compromiser and pragmatist in many ways, and though his neutrality policy adopted in 1939 was anathema to British imperialist die-hards like Churchill and was portrayed in the press as a betrayal for propaganda purposes, it represented a high point in Anglo-Irish intelligence co-operation. The appointment of a full-time British diplomatic representative in Dublin for the first time in 1939 marked the beginning of a new phase of high-quality intelligence on Ireland. Initially, the British were obsessed by the fear of Ireland as a 'back door' for their enemies and the linked danger of an Irish fifth column, a concern 'shaped by deep-rooted, cultural stereotypes of Ireland and the Irish' (326). This phase passed after the summer of 1940. From then on, covert operations and increasing co-operation with Irish military intelligence led to more accurate and wide-ranging information entering an increasingly sophisticated intelligence system, which, in turn, contributed to 'wiser policy-making and allowed the British government to extract maximum benefits from Irish neutrality' (328). It also helped to shift British perceptions of Ireland in

a more realistic direction and contributed to the British establishment finally coming to terms with Irish independence.

This is the first in a new series on the 'History of British Intelligence' from the Boydell Press, under the editorship of Peter Martland, and marks an auspicious start. Paul McMahon not only adds to our knowledge of the evolution of the British intelligence system in general but contributes a new dimension to our understanding of Anglo-Irish relations in the years covered.

Donal Ó Drisceoil
University College, Cork

Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar: 'A Dagger in the Spine of Spain?'*, Brighton and Portland, OR, Sussex Academic Press, 2009; xv + 304 pp.; US\$55.00 hbk; ISBN 9781845193010

Spain's relationship with the military fortress of Gibraltar and its surrounding community has been subject to intense debate since the British took the Rock in 1704. With this work Gareth Stockey seeks to revive the subject, with an emphasis on the period from 1900 through to 1954. Queen Elizabeth II's visit to the Rock in that year led to a series of reactionary policies from the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco that culminated in the closure of the border between Gibraltar and the adjacent Campo de Gibraltar in 1969. This book merges traditional diplomatic history — the framework used by most previous writers on the subject — with insights from 'borderlands' studies in order to place Franco's actions in context. The result is an analysis that squarely blames Franco alone for the current hostility and separateness that exists between Gibraltar and the Campo. While clear that Spain always claimed Gibraltar should be its territory, Stockey nonetheless demonstrates that for the first half of the twentieth century an important and deep relationship between the Campo and Gibraltar flourished, even in times of civil conflict and war.

Stockey grounds the close relationship between the Campo and Gibraltar in the economic, social, linguistic and family ties that emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, as both regions industrialized. While the Gibraltarian 'moneyed class' was separate from this process, the working classes of the region merged through marriage and language usage, making the Gibraltarian workers part of Spanish culture (34–5). The continued economic interdependency of the Campo and Gibraltar over the course of most of the century provided the opportunity for such cross-cultural ties to deepen. During the first world war over 12,000 Spaniards entered Gibraltar daily for work (38). While this number declined in the 1920s because of a general economic downturn, by the early part of the second world war, into 1941, it was back up to 10,000 per day (173), and at its peak, in 1951, 12,500 Spaniards came to work on the Rock (204–5).